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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UNSC](#) [MO](#) [AG](#) [WI](#)

SUBJECT: UNSC: BRIEFING ON WESTERN SAHARA NEGOTIATIONS;
U.S. BELIEVES MEANINGFUL AUTONOMY IS A REALISTIC WAY FORWARD

REF: STATE 96096

¶1. Summary: In a July 11 closed briefing to the Security Council, the Secretary General's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara Peter van Walsum explained that he had included recommendations in his report that were eventually deleted in order to suggest a way for the parties to move beyond "atmospherics" and begin to address substantive issues during the August negotiations. Responding to van Walsum's remarks, several delegations stressed the importance of the strict UN neutrality in dealing with the Moroccan and Polisario proposals. Van Walsum's comment that delegations should consider whether their support for either Morocco or the Polisario was "useful" or merely a "feel good" measure brought sharp responses from South Africa and Russia. Ambassador Sanders delivered the U.S. statement expressing its belief that meaningful autonomy is a promising and realistic way forward. The Council approved a Press Statement welcoming the report and expressing hope for progress during the next round of talks in August. End Summary.

¶2. In his July 11 closed consultations briefing to the Security Council on the "Report of the Secretary-General on the status and progress of the negotiations on Western Sahara" (S/2007/385), the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara Peter van Walsum said that he had included recommendations that were eventually deleted (following objections by Morocco, the Polisario and other parties) in order to provide an impetus for the parties to move beyond "atmospherics" and begin to address substantive issues during the August negotiations. (Note: the deleted sections had included, inter alia, a recommendation that the parties focus on the Moroccan autonomy proposal (objectionable to the Polisario) and had suggested that sovereignty was a issue (objectionable to Morocco. End Note). Van Walsum said that the parties have thus far persisted in maintaining their incompatible positions, particularly on issues of self-determination and sovereignty that it was necessary to find a way for them to move on to substance.

¶3. Council members generally expressed satisfaction with the progress of the negotiations. But van Walsum's comments on three issues -- expectations for the August round of talks; the role of the UN; and the role of "friends" of the parties -- stimulated some lively commentary from Council members. Van Walsum told the Council that he had not yet developed an agenda for the August 10-11 talks, but planned to do so after meeting with the parties in early August. He confessed that he was concerned that he would have nothing of substance to report to the Council after the August meeting. But several delegations, reacting to van Walsum's strong preference for

the parties to begin substantive discussions, said that they had no expectation that the parties would necessarily engage substantively at such an early stage. Belgium, supported by Russia, suggested that at this point in the negotiations process was equivalent to substance and that the role of the UN should be to act as a neutral facilitator and as the guardian of the process. Italy added that the time had not yet come for the UN to step into an end game. Rather it was important to refrain from applying unbalanced pressure on one side or the other that would psychologically disadvantage one party or the other and thereby contribute to inflexibility.

¶4. During the discussion, responding to a question, Van Walsum said that while he advocated the concept of "responsible support" for one side or the other by parties not directly involved in the talks, he wanted such supporting parties to look within themselves and ask whether such support for either the Moroccans or the Polisario was "useful" or merely made them "feel good." To be specific, van Walsum continued, some entities had supported the Polisario to such an extent that they are now not inclined to concede on the issue of a referendum with independence as an option, but these same entities had not learnt support sufficient to really change the situation on the ground. Van Walsum said he felt such support produced retrenchment and a perpetuation of the status quo that should be avoided in future.

¶5. In a sharp rebuke, South Africa PR Kumalo said South Africa supported the Polisario cause unabashedly and unashamedly, that he himself was sitting in the Council because of support provided by other nations during the Apartheid era, that the Western Sahara issue remained the last decolonization issue on the African Union agenda, and that the ultimate disposition of the situation had to involve self-determination. Russia emphasized the need for absolute and strict neutrality by the UN in dealing with the Moroccan and Polisario proposals. In response to van Walsum's interpretation that the intent of UNSCR 1754 was to provide more weight to the Moroccan plan, Russia said that UNSCR 1754 had provided no basis which to favor one proposal over the other and that it was important to avoid interpretation to more important to emphasize implementation.

¶6. Ambassador Sanders delivered the U.S. statement (reftel) expressing the U.S. belief that meaningful autonomy is a promising and realistic way forward and that the serious and credible Moroccan initiative could provide a realistic framework for negotiations. Because she was the next-to-last speaker, no other Council members commented on her remarks. Following closed consultations, Ambassador Sanders also read the U.S. statement to the Press at the Press Stakeout.

¶7. The Security Council approved a Press Statement (below) offered by "Friends of Western Sahara" and based on a U.S. draft. Text follows:

Press Statement on Western Sahara

The members of the Security Council welcome the report of the Secretary-General of 29 June (S/2007/385) on the status and

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progress of the negotiations on Western Sahara.

The members of the Security Council are very pleased that the parties and States of the region agreed to meet on June 18 and 19 in accordance with resolution 1754 (2007).

The members of the Security Council support the agreement by the parties that negotiations will continue in the second week of August under UN auspices and express their hope the parties will use the next round of negotiations to engage in good faith in substantial negotiations on the way forward in accordance with resolution 1754 (2007).

The members of the Security Council reaffirm their strong support for the efforts of the Secretary-General and his

Personal Envoy to implement resolution 1754 (2007).
End Text.
KHALILZAD